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ABSTRACT

The Kids Count project is an effort to track the status of children in the United States by providing policymakers and citizens with national and state benchmarks of well-being. This multi-publication packet describes the project and several factors that increase the likelihood of children's academic success. The first of two pamphlets, the "Kids Count Data Book, 1997: Overview," presents the background for the project; identifies experiences that can contribute to children's success, including preschool experience, smaller schools, high standards, meaningful family participation, and community commitment to healthy youth and family development; and outlines what policymakers need to do to create favorable conditions. The second pamphlet, "Kids Count: A Pocket Guide on America's Youth," presents graphs of national trends for 10 indicators of well-being: (1) percent low birthweight babies; (2) infant morality rate; (3) child death rate; (4) teen violent death rate; (5) teen birth rate; (6) juvenile violent crime arrest rate; (7) dropout rate; (8) idle teen rate; (9) child poverty rate; and (10) single parent family rate. The pamphlet also presents in tabular form current state data for these and additional indicators, and provides state contacts for Kids Count projects. The remainder of the packet is comprised of nine single-page documents discussing experiences identified as contributing to children's success: (1) school readiness; (2) small schools; (3) standards; (4) family participation; (5) school-community partnerships; (6) decentralization; (7) professional development; (8) school-based accountability; and (9) innovations and experiments. Each of these sheets describes how the concept is applied in effective programs, and provides resources for further information. (KDFB)

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Education Ideas that Count

SUCCESS IN SCHOOL

PS 025501

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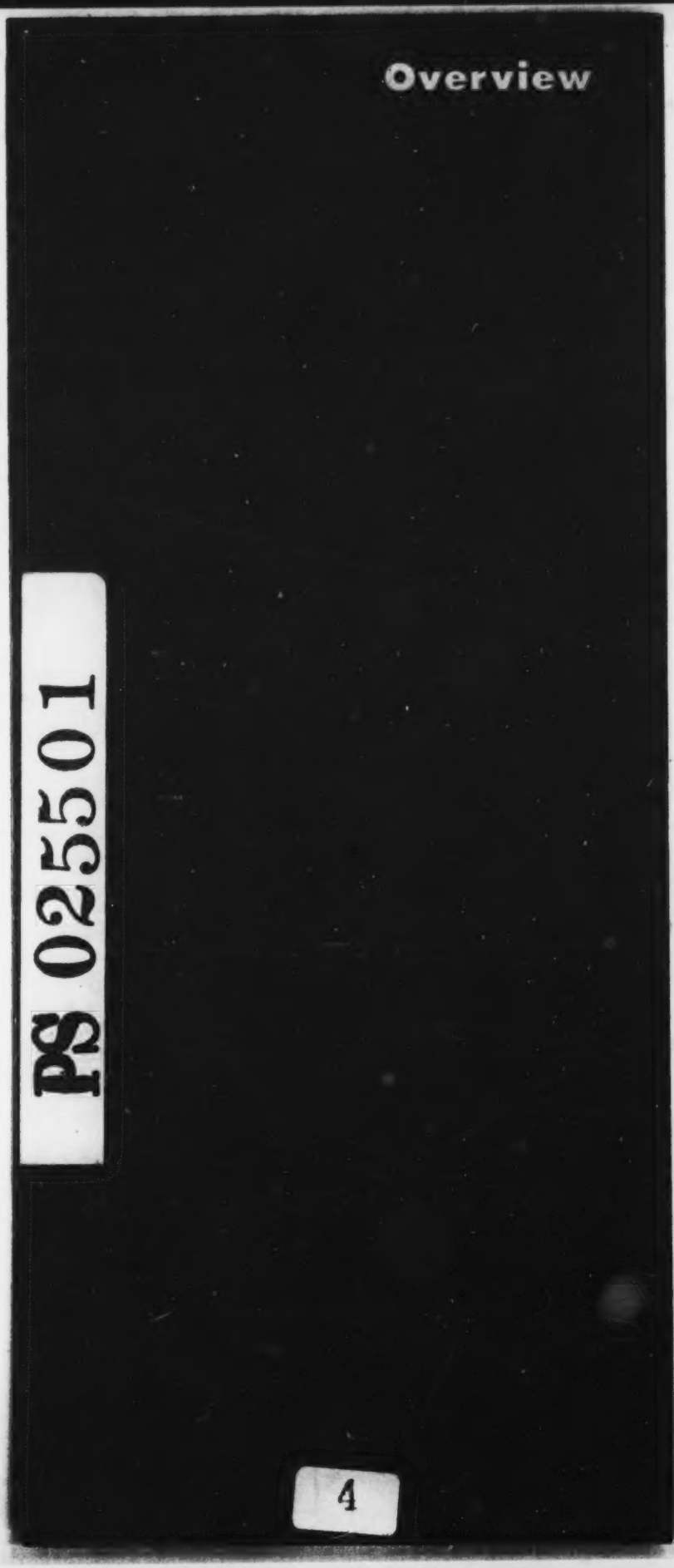
KIDS COUNT, a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, is a national and state-by-state effort to track the status of children in the United States. By providing policymakers and citizens with benchmarks of child well-being, KIDS COUNT seeks to enrich local, state, and national discussions concerning ways to secure better futures for all children. At the national level, the principal activity of the initiative is the publication of the annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book*, which uses the best available data to measure the educational, social, economic, and physical well-being of children. The Foundation also funds a nationwide network of state-level KIDS COUNT projects that provide a more detailed community-by-community picture of the condition of children.



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Overview

The 7.1 million children growing up in poor communities today face tough odds.[1] Research predicts that they are at greater risk of being sick and having inadequate health care; of being parents before they complete school; of being users of easily available drugs; of being exposed to violence; and of being incarcerated before they are old enough to vote. Although poor neighborhoods include individuals and families with extraordinary resilience and strength, too many kids growing up in such environments will reach adulthood unprepared to parent, to work, and to contribute to society.

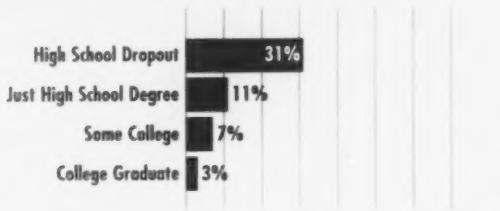
Improving the odds for children in low-income communities will require many things, including greater access to supports that all families need to raise kids successfully—employment opportunities for parents, quality health care, formal and informal networks of adults who can assist in times of crisis, vibrant religious institutions, organized recreation, and safe streets. But of all the community institutions that help children become capable adults, perhaps none is more important than school. For generations, education has been the vehicle for advancing the social and economic status of children and families, compensating for poverty and distressed environments, and, for

millions of kids, paving the way to opportunities unavailable to their parents. Traditionally, good schools in America's neighborhoods fueled family dreams and fortified children's futures.

Today, the importance of education is greater than ever. Because of changes in our economy and the demands of the workplace, literacy, computational, computer-literacy, and problem-solving skills are even more powerful predictors of a child's future success. Research shows that school completion and academic success increase children's ability to escape poverty, form strong families, and raise successful kids of their own. The poverty rate for high school dropouts is 10 times that of college graduates (see Figure 1). Moreover, college graduates earn twice the annual income of adults with only a high school diploma and three times the income of high school dropouts.[2] In other words, a good education is one of the strongest ways to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty (see Figure 2).

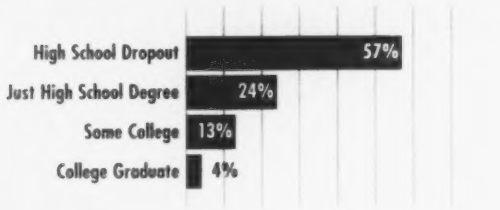
Tragically, the potential of education to offset the disadvantages of growing up in a poor neighborhood is not being realized. In fact, the likelihood of getting a decent education is decreasing in the very communities where it is needed most. If our nation is to remain prosperous and committed to equality of opportunity, we must create successful schools for poor children. This fundamental challenge is the theme of our eighth annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book.*

Figure 1. Poverty Rate by Educational Attainment for Persons 25-54 in 1995



NCES, Special Tabulation of U.S. Census Bureau March 1996 Current Population Survey

Figure 2. Child Poverty Rate by Education of Parent(s) in 1995



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Schools in Poor Communities

Overall, our nation's schools have made steady improvement over the last decade. For example, high school students are completing more rigorous curricula, and dropout rates have decreased.[3] These improvements, however, are not evident in schools serving our poorest

communities. In 1994, for example, the dropout rate for kids in low-income families was five times as high as that for kids in more affluent families.[4] Moreover, schools with high proportions of poor kids score lower on standardized achievement tests, and students attending schools in poor neighborhoods learn less. According to the Center on National Education Policy, 13-year-old students in poor school districts have the math skills of 9-year-olds in more affluent schools.[5]

Few would dispute that such dismal results are connected, at least in part, to the challenges poor children bring to school each day. Children in low-income families, for example, have fewer role models to inspire academic success, and compared with other kids, they are raised in homes with fewer books and are read to less. The poor nutrition associated with poverty also affects school performance and leads to more frequent illness and school absence. In addition, many poor children live daily with the distractions of drugs and violence that afflict our most distressed communities.

The challenge of providing poor children with the education they need and deserve starts with money. According to a recent report by the U.S. General Accounting Office, more affluent districts spend about 24 percent more per student than poor districts.[6] One consequence of this funding disparity is that schools in poor neighborhoods are more likely to have inadequate heating, plumbing, lighting, safety, and space. Students attending such

schools are also apt to have fewer and older textbooks; insufficient instructional supplies; and less access to calculators, computers, and advanced technology.

But the educational disadvantage of poor children goes beyond basic bricks, mortar, and books. Schools in high-poverty neighborhoods tend to have the least experienced and least prepared teachers. On average, such schools have more teachers with three or less years experience and, in core subjects, have more teachers who did not specialize in the subjects they teach.[3]

Perhaps the most disturbing expression of educational inequity is the low expectations we have for schools in poor neighborhoods and for the students who attend them. Typically, such schools have lower standards, as measured by the lack of challenging courses, extensive use of tracking, and inflated grading practices. According to a U.S. Department of Education report, students receiving grades of "A" in high-poverty schools achieve at about the same level as "C" and "D" students elsewhere.[4]

What Kids in Poor Communities Need

Providing poor children with the same learning opportunities that more advantaged students receive is possible, but it will require a level of imagination, commitment, and collaboration that most education-reform efforts have thus far failed to produce. The truth is, there is no easy fix to the problem of bad schools in poor neighborhoods—no one-time infusion of money, no donation of computers, and no

quick influx of reading volunteers will suffice. At a minimum, turning around schools in poor communities will require a comprehensive, decade-long commitment, driven by data and informed by research and best practice.

Specifically, we can point to five ideas that have demonstrated that they can positively contribute to kids' success in school and overall development:

- preschool experiences that prepare children to learn;
- schools that are small enough to engage every child;
- high standards in curriculum, instruction, and assessment;
- strong, meaningful family participation;
- making education part of a larger community commitment to healthy youth and family development.

Preschool experiences that prepare children to learn. High-quality early childhood care and preschool education can stimulate cognitive development, increase school readiness, and advance academic achievement in the early elementary grades.[7] In 1993, however, 40 percent of 3- to 5-year-olds were not in nursery school or kindergarten. A growing number of states—for example, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, and Vermont—are promoting and expanding the development of high-quality Head Start, zero-to-three, and other programs aimed at improving the chances that disadvantaged kids will begin their formal education ready to learn. In many cities, Reach Out and Read programs are integrating literacy development into well-child visits with health-care providers. Across the country, these critical preschool resources should be targeted to districts where the need is greatest.

Schools that are small enough to engage every child. Small schools—whether freestanding or schools-within-schools—nurture positive teacher-student relationships; provide more instructional flexibility to respond to kids' specific learning styles; and provide a safer, more secure educational climate.[10] Several cities have developed models of small, supportive learning environments that improve attendance and achievement. In New York City, for example, small secondary schools created by teachers and community organizations, called New Visions Schools, are demonstrating the difference that engaging teaching can make in expanding horizons for our most at-risk kids. Since 1992, the 21 New Visions Schools have shown higher attendance rates and lower dropout rates than other public schools in the city. Moreover, students in New Visions Schools are performing at above-average levels of academic achievement.

High standards in curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Effective schools have high learning standards, challenging curricula based on those standards, and instructional practices that keep kids actively engaged in learning. Such schools also develop assessments, tied to their standards and curricula, that are used to help kids and parents understand academic progress and to help teachers adjust instructional practices. High standards show children that schools care, that learning is valuable, and, most importantly, that they have the ability to succeed. States like Kentucky, Washington, and

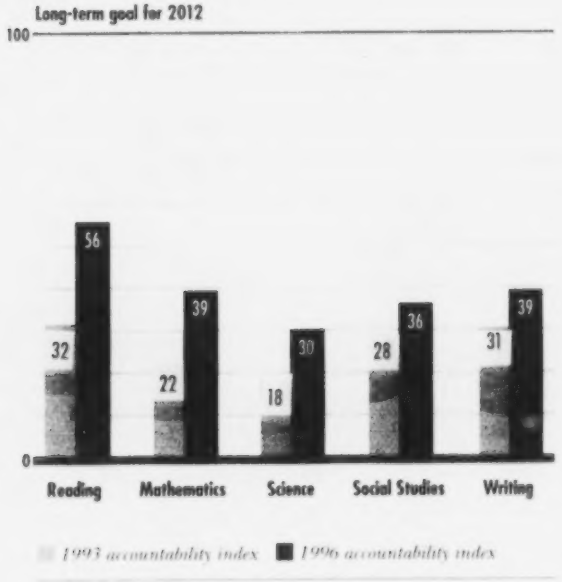
Maryland and districts like Milwaukee and Philadelphia have taken significant steps to set standards that are aligned with curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices. In Kentucky, for example, there have been significant achievement gains in reading, writing, math, science, and social studies among 4th graders—the grade cohort that started school at the beginning of the statewide reform effort. At the local level, in Philadelphia, the Central East Middle School's Talent Development Model combines higher level courses and enriched learning experiences for all students, regardless of previous school performance, with "extra doses" of support when students show signs of falling behind their peers. This effort has resulted in significant academic gains for all students.[11]

Strong, meaningful family participation. Active and informed family participation has long been recognized as a key element of successfully educating children. For some families, involvement means communicating frequently with teachers, knowing what goes on in their child's school, and helping kids with their homework. For others, it means participating on school councils that make decisions about school policy. While the level of involvement will differ from family to family, good schools welcome them as genuine partners and contributors to their children's education.[12] In poor communities, where many adults' negative school experiences have left them uncomfortable, distrustful, and hesitant to become involved, family

Education Reform Working in Kentucky

The Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA), enacted in 1990, was a sweeping education reform package that put in place provisions for stronger preschool programs, ungraded primary programs, higher standards for academic performance, new curricula, school-based accountability, a new comprehensive assessment program, and family resource centers that link poor kids and families to social services. Beneficiaries of this effort include Kentucky 4th graders, whose progress toward the state's long-term goals for 2012 are shown below.

Progress Among 4th Graders in Kentucky 1992-93 to 1995-96



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participation is a significant challenge. It is, however, one that can be successfully addressed. For example, the Texas Interfaith Education Foundation's Alliance School Project provides opportunities for families and teachers to learn about effective school-reform practices and to work together in addressing the needs of both kids and families. In 1993-1994, 44 of the then 55 Alliance Schools increased the numbers of students passing all sections of Texas' standardized academic skills test. And, in 1994-1995, test scores improved in 58 of the 70 Alliance Schools. Similarly, Dr. James Comer's School Development Program, operating in schools across the country, has engaged families in school-management decisions and other meaningful activities.

Making education part of a larger community commitment to healthy youth and family development. Although critically important, good schools are only one variable in the equation that determines a child's life chances. To thrive, children—especially at-risk kids—need religious institutions, family-support centers, recreational activities, cultural enrichment, libraries, and a host of other resources that contribute to their civic, social, emotional, and educational development.[11] Even the strongest schools need to partner with organizations that will supplement their efforts and jointly accept responsibility for improving youth outcomes. Among the hundreds of school-community partnerships operating in low-income neighborhoods across the country is the New York City

Beacons program. These school-based community centers, which are open in the evenings and on weekends and provide a wide range of activities and services in one setting, have demonstrated that schools, working with communities, can effectively broaden learning and extend supports to families as well as children. The Red Hook Beacon in Brooklyn, for example, offers an after-school center for elementary school students; a computer education center for kids and adults; a newspaper written and published by neighborhood teens; weekly family nights; athletic leagues; and several different counseling and health services. Another successful partnership is the Los Angeles-based Vaughn Family Center, a collaboration of schools, local agencies, and parents that offers counseling, tutoring, housing assistance, and immunizations and that helps parents develop the skills they need to become effective advocates for their children and themselves.[9]

No single idea mentioned above is, in and of itself, a "magic bullet" that will ensure the effectiveness of schools in poor communities. But taken together, and viewed as parts of a whole, we believe that these proven ideas are powerful enough to improve the quality and increase the impact of education on the lives and futures of kids who are most at risk.

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What Policymakers Need to Do

Across the country there are schools in distressed communities that have shown that all kids can achieve at high levels. These schools, like the kids they serve, must overcome significant odds. Unfortunately, such schools tend to be the exception rather than the rule.

As promising and vital as these exemplary schools are, the sad and simple fact is that there are too few of them to stem the tide of failure that overwhelms some of our poorest school districts. Put simply, while these successful schools may reach tens of thousands of poor kids, our nation needs an agenda that will address the needs of the millions of poor children living in distressed communities. Such an approach requires new policies and incentives that will restructure, reform, and revitalize the operation of large school systems and that will enhance the ability of individual schools to innovate. Policymakers need to create the broad systemic conditions that will encourage the development of schools where effective teaching and learning is the norm. At a minimum, policymakers ought to:

- decentralize authority and resources to local schools;
- support and reward the development of principals and teachers;
- create systems for school-based accountability.

Decentralize authority and resources to local schools. While decentralization of authority and resources is hardly a new idea, it is rarely done

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with enough depth to have a significant impact on school practice. Meaningful decentralization moves operating funds to the school level and gives spending discretion to schools. Moreover, such decentralization allows genuinely representative school-based governance structures—for example, local school councils of principals, teachers, parents, and community representatives—to make critical decisions about key personnel, curricula, schedules, instructional programs, materials, and facilities.

Support and reward the development of principals and teachers. In addition to autonomy and resources, serious reform requires professional development that can enhance the learning environment within schools. Such development activities provide educators with regular opportunities to access knowledge and develop new skills—by working with each other and with outside sources that they believe are most credible.[15] Without more serious attention to the ways in which school districts support professional development—particularly for principals—even the most thoughtful school-reform efforts will be incomplete and uneven.

Create systems for school-based accountability. In return for additional school-based authority, resources, and support, teachers and their unions must work with school district leaders to create meaningful accountability strategies that offer fair rewards and sanctions to individual schools and that provide incentives for systemwide improve-

ment. Given the experiences of some states and districts—for example, Kentucky, Maryland, and Philadelphia—we acknowledge the difficulty in creating such a process. Yet concrete action around school accountability may be the most obvious and critical indication that public and political leaders are, in fact, serious about improving the educational quality of our most distressed schools.

Sustained Commitment and Resolve

The recommendations presented here represent a belief that our nation can and must fix our most troubled schools. Although this agenda is difficult and complex, enough is known to move forward with some confidence. What is needed now is commitment and resolve, which can only be demonstrated by taking bold action and forging new relationships among educational stakeholders. Specifically:

- School-system leaders must demonstrate that they value their relationship with local communities. They can do so by engaging and listening to community constituents and creating reform plans that respect and respond to their needs and perceptions. Equally important is providing teachers, and others who work with kids, with compensation and working environments that reflect the importance of their challenging work.

- Unions, parents, school boards, community organizations, and politicians must demonstrate that they can put aside traditional differences, can make student needs—rather than adult needs—the priority, and can work collaboratively on behalf of kids. Doing so will require these groups to move beyond traditional antagonism and finger pointing, to focus on the common objective of improving educational outcomes, and to accept collective responsibility for results.

- **States must demonstrate that they will fulfill their responsibility to ensure an equitable and adequate education for all students. They can do so by providing disadvantaged districts with an equitable level of fiscal support that is sufficient to meet the varied needs of our poorest kids; by giving districts the autonomy needed to pursue creative reforms; and by holding districts publicly accountable for student success.**

As any observer of education reform knows, the systemwide commitments outlined above are hard to secure. Politics, professional turf, and competing interests have too often delayed real change. Unfortunately, kids consigned to inadequate schools cannot afford further delay.

In those places where key stakeholders are unable to find the resolve and resources to make meaningful change, we ought to consider more direct ways of ensuring that poor kids have a chance at adequate schooling. If necessary, such explorations should include a variety of nontraditional options and approaches such as networks of schools organized around instructional methods or educational themes; new alternative schools created through innovative public/private partnerships; multisite learning environments connected through technology; equal-access charter schools with innovative governance structures and creative curricula; and, finally, the assumption of responsibility for local schools by states where that is the only way to secure equitable educational opportunities for all kids. In addition, we believe such explorations should include consideration of school-choice programs that genuinely empower parents and that realistically expand educational options for the poorest families and kids. We believe, for example, there is merit to the idea—recently

advanced by observers from both sides of the political spectrum—of providing means-tested scholarships that target our poorest families.[16] These scholarships would provide all eligible families with the amount of money a district would spend annually on a given student.

In addition to adequate financial support, strong versions of school-choice strategies have to provide access to a diverse array of high-quality learning environments—including private schools and public schools in neighboring school districts—and hold those schools accountable for positive results. Finally, we believe that any choice plan worthy of serious consideration should be limited to those schools that are truly willing to provide alternative learning opportunities to *all* kids who seek them.

In sum, all strategies that might accelerate system improvements for poor students should be considered and evaluated on their merits, rather than their politics, and tested against criteria that assess their ability to offer kids and their families quality options, real opportunities, and improved outcomes. These strategies, moreover, should be embraced, not as an evasion of the public obligation to provide free and adequate schooling, but as a last resort to fulfilling that obligation.

Conclusion

Currently, there are more than 7 million kids living in poor neighborhoods who face a grim future clouded by predictably lousy outcomes. While reasonable people might debate the most powerful mix of strategies and approaches for improving the life chances of disadvantaged children, everyone agrees that a high-quality education is at least part of the solution.

As a nation, we may not yet know how to do everything that is necessary to transform our poorest communities into family-supporting environments. We may not yet know enough about creating adequate jobs, ensuring public safety, or keeping drugs off our street corners and out of our kids' lives. We do, however, know how to create stronger schools that help children learn. The challenge for poor communities and the nation is creating the conditions that allow such schools to be the rule rather than the exception. For this, we need more than just knowledge—we need greater public will and more tenacious resolve. And we need it now.

Douglas W. Nelson
President
The Annie E. Casey Foundation

Endnotes

1. The 7.1 million figure is the number of children under age 18 living in neighborhoods where the poverty rate is 30 percent or more. This figure comes from a special Census Bureau tabulation of the March 1996 Current Population Survey.

2. U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996, "Money Income in the United States: 1995," *Current Population Reports*, Series P60-193, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, September, Table 9.

3. For a good overall analysis of the current state of American education, see Center on National Education Policy, 1996, *The Good—and the Not-So-Good—News About American Schools*, Washington, DC.

4. U.S. Department of Education, 1996, *Dropout Rates in the United States: 1994*, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Washington, DC, p. 10.

5. See note 3 above.

6. These spending figures are based on adjustments which take into account geographic differences in costs as well as the relative number of disabled and poor students in the state. The figures are reported in U.S. General Accounting Office, 1997, *School Finance: State Efforts to Reduce Funding Gaps Between Poor and Wealthy Districts*, HEHS-97-31, Washington, DC.

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15. Darling-Hammond, L., and M. McLaughlin, 1995, "Policies That Support Professional Development in an Era of Reform," *Phi Delta Kappan*, Vol. 76, No. 8, April, pp. 597-604.

16. Galston, W.A., and D. Ravitch, 1996, "Scholarships for Inner-City Kids," *The Washington Post*, December 17.

Endnotes

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The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. It was established in 1948 by Jim Casey, one of the founders of United Parcel Service, and his siblings, who named the Foundation in honor of their mother. The primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. In pursuit of this goal, the Foundation makes grants that help states, cities, and communities fashion more innovative, cost-effective responses to these needs.

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A Pocket Guide on
America's Youth

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Kids Count is a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation to track the status of children in the United States. By providing policymakers and citizens with benchmarks of child well-being, Kids Count seeks to enrich local, state, and national discussions concerning ways to secure better futures for all children. The initiative publishes the annual *Kids Count Data Book*, which uses the best available data to measure the educational, social, economic, and physical well-being of children. For ordering information, see back cover. This *Pocket Guide* is derived from the 11-page *Kids Count Data Book*. The Foundation also funds a nationwide network of state-level Kids Count projects that provide a more detailed, community-level picture of the condition of America's children.

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Overview

Research shows that school completion and academic success increase children's ability to escape poverty, form strong families, and raise successful kids of their own. Tragically, the potential of education to offset the disadvantages of growing up in a poor neighborhood is not being realized. In fact, the likelihood of getting a decent education is decreasing in the very communities where it is needed most.

Providing poor children with the same learning opportunities that more advantaged students receive is possible, but it will require a level of imagination, commitment, and collaboration that most education-reform efforts have thus far failed to produce. The truth is, there is no easy fix to the problem of bad schools in poor neighborhoods—no one-time infusion of money, no donation of computers, and no quick influx of reading volunteers will suffice. At a minimum, turning around schools in poor communities will require a comprehensive, decade-long commitment, driven by data and informed by research and best practice.

Enough is known to move forward with increasing confidence to fix our most troubled schools. What is needed now is commitment and resolve, which can only be demonstrated by taking bold action and forging new relationships among educational stakeholders. Unions, parents, school boards, community organizations, and politicians must demonstrate that they can put aside traditional differences, can make student needs—rather than adult needs—the priority, and can work collaboratively on behalf of kids. Large school systems require new policies and incentives that will restructure, reform, and revitalize their operations and that will enhance the ability of individual schools to innovate.

As a nation, we may not yet know how to do everything that is necessary to transform our poorest communities into family-supporting environments. We do, however, know how to create stronger schools that help children learn. What is needed is greater public will and more tenacious resolve. And we need it now.

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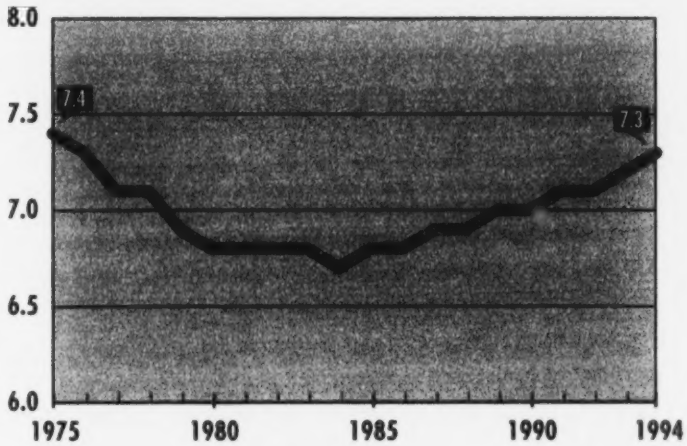
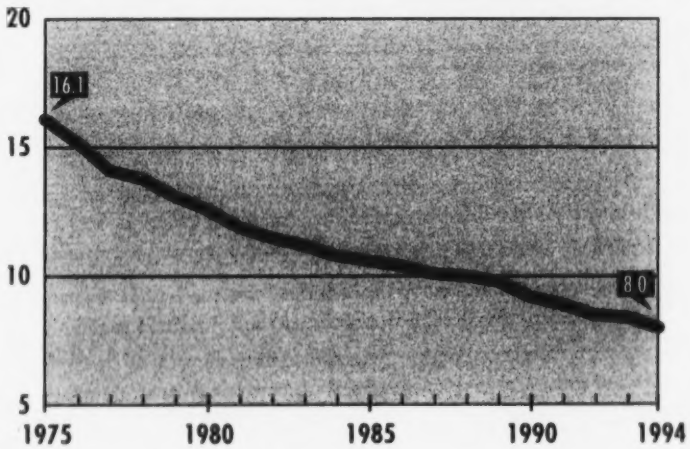
Percent Low Birth-Weight Babies, 1975–1994



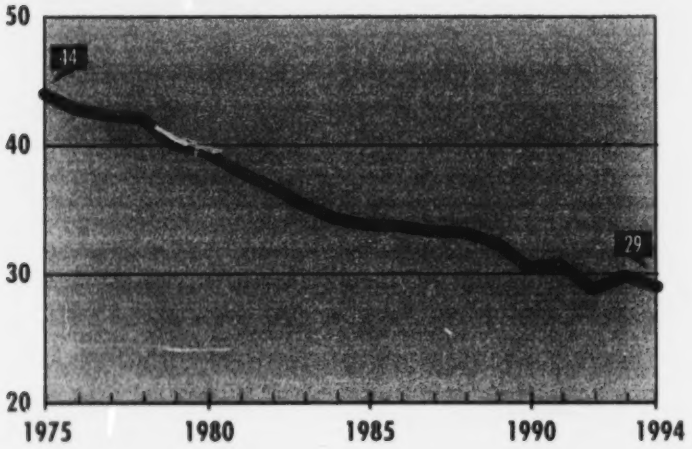
The percentage of babies weighing under 5.5 pounds at birth has risen over the past 10 years to 7.3 percent in 1994—its highest level since 1976.

Infant Deaths per 1,000 Live Births, 1975–1994



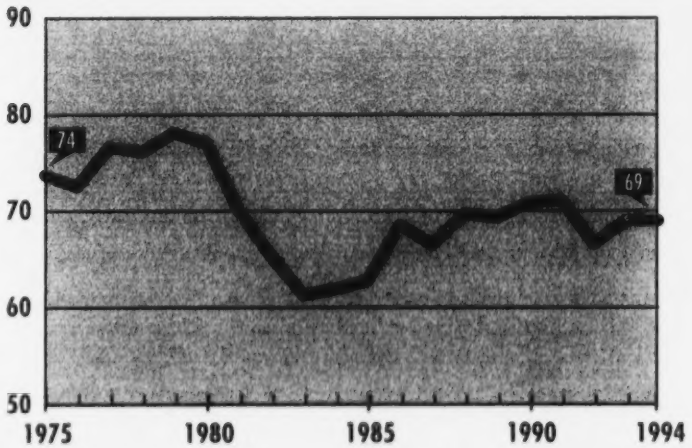
In the last 20 years, the infant mortality rate has been cut in half—from 16.1 in 1975 to 8.0 in 1994.

Child Deaths per 100,000 Children Ages 1–14, 1975–1994



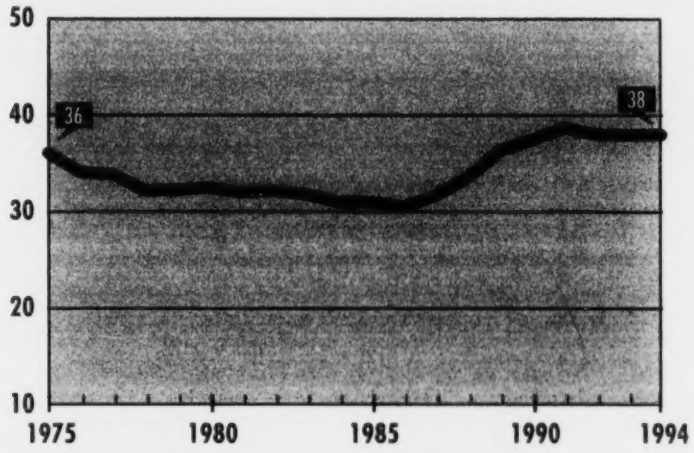
The child death rate has fallen 34 percent since 1975, reaching 29 deaths per 100,000 children in 1994.

Deaths by Accident, Homicide, and Suicide per 100,000 Teens Ages 15–19, 1975–1994



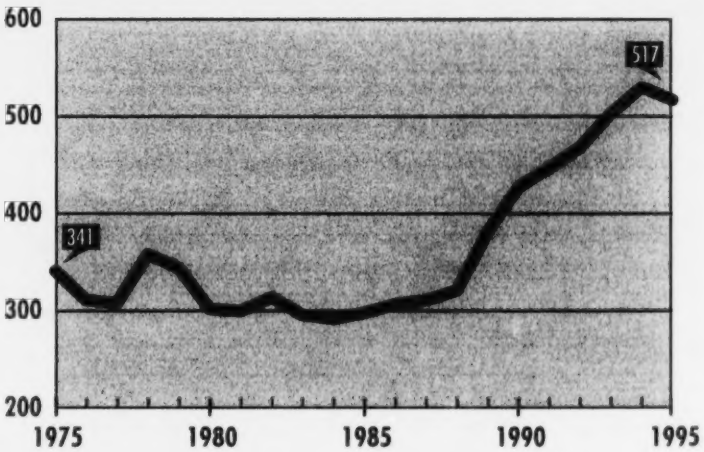
There were 69 deaths by accident, homicide, and suicide for every 100,000 teens in 1994—13 percent higher than in 1983, but well below the peak rate of 78 in 1979.

Teen Birth Rate
Births per 1,000 Females Ages 15–17, 1975–1994



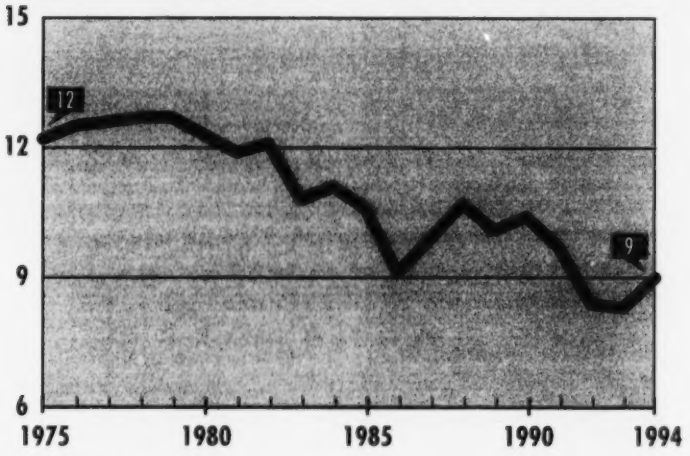
After declining to 31 births per 1,000 teen girls in the mid-1980s, teenage childbearing has risen 23 percent to 38 births per 1,000 teens in 1994.

Juvenile Violent Crime Arrests per 100,000 Youths Ages 10–17, 1975–1995



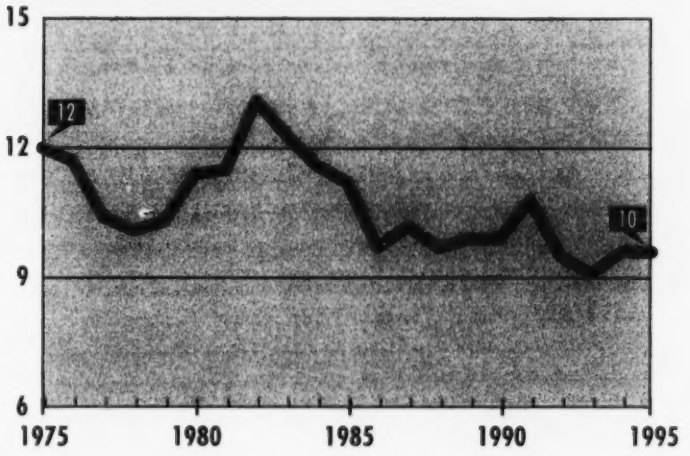
Juvenile arrests for violent crimes began to soar in the late 1980s. In 1995, the rate was 517 arrests per 100,000 youths, a slight decline from 1994.

High School Dropouts
Percent of 16–19 Year-Olds Not in School and Not High School Grads, 1975–1994



Despite an increase in the last few years, 16–19 year-olds were less likely to drop out of school in 1994 (9 percent) than in 1975 (12 percent).

Idle Teens
Percent of 16–19 Year-Olds Not in School and Not Working, 1975–1995



About 10 percent of youth are currently neither in school nor at work—a measure that reflects the difficulties of the transition from school to work.

	Percent low birth-weight babies	Infant deaths per 1,000 live births	Child deaths per 100,000 children ages 1–14	Deaths by accident, homicide, & suicide per 100,000 teens ages 15–19	Teen births per 1,000 females ages 15–17	Juvenile violent crime arrests per 100,000 youths ages 10–17	% of 16–19 year-olds who are high school dropouts	% of 16–19 year-olds not in school & not working	Percent of children in poverty	% of families with children under age 18 headed by single parent	% of 3–5 yr.-olds not enrolled in nursery school or kindergarten, 1993	% of 4th graders scoring below basic reading level, 1994	% of 4th graders scoring below basic math level, 1996	% of children living with parents who were high school dropouts, 1994	where more than 25% of 16–19 yr. olds were high school dropouts, 1990	% of children in neighborhoods
UNITED STATES	7.3	8.0	29	69	38	517	9	9	21	26	40	41	38	15		9.8
Alabama	9.0	10.1	36	97	51	262	11	10	24	27	49	48	52	15		7.4
Alaska	5.5	7.6	28	91	32	384	7	11	12	25	46	N.A.	35	5		6.2
Arizona	6.8	7.8	34	80	50	520	13	11	23	26	42	48	43	17		17.2
Arkansas	8.2	9.2	40	91	49	307	8	10	22	24	41	46	46	12		5.5
California	6.2	7.0	26	72	46	651	10	10	25	26	43	56	54	26		18.2
Colorado	8.5	7.0	24	74	34	459	11	9	13	24	39	41	33	7		9.1
Connecticut	6.9	7.9	24	59	29	577	3	4	18	24	23	32	25	10		8.1
Delaware	7.4	6.8	18	52	45	558	7	7	13	28	32	48	46	9		8.3
District of Columbia	14.2	18.2	61	346	88	1,650	11	14	37	58	40	N.A.	80	30		27.2
Florida	7.7	8.1	33	67	42	805	13	11	25	30	35	50	45	16		15.0
Georgia	8.6	10.2	32	74	49	448	12	10	21	29	47	48	47	15		13.2
Hawaii	7.2	6.7	23	40	32	263	5	9	14	22	36	54	47	7		2.0

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Idaho	5.5	6.9	32	72	27	288	11	10	18	17	51	N.A.	N.A.	10	7.5
Illinois	7.9	9.3	32	86	41	389	10	9	21	26	40	N.A.	N.A.	15	10.1
Indiana	6.8	8.8	30	65	35	493	8	8	17	24	47	34	28	11	10.4
Iowa	5.9	7.5	25	61	23	262	4	5	13	21	36	31	26	6	3.7
Kansas	6.5	7.7	28	80	30	315	7	6	16	23	41	N.A.	N.A.	6	5.4
Kentucky	7.7	7.8	27	66	40	513	12	12	26	24	41	44	40	16	11.7
Louisiana	9.6	10.6	35	91	51	565	13	14	34	33	35	60	56	20	8.3
Maine	5.7	6.2	20	54	18	126	4	5	17	25	38	25	25	7	1.0
Maryland	8.5	9.0	30	61	33	704	8	8	15	26	29	45	41	13	10.3
Massachusetts	6.4	6.0	17	40	24	610	6	7	16	26	33	31	29	10	8.5
Michigan	7.8	8.6	30	71	32	431	8	8	21	28	33	N.A.	32	11	7.7
Minnesota	5.7	7.0	23	48	20	416	8	7	16	25	39	35	24	7	2.4
Mississippi	9.9	11.0	41	110	58	295	10	11	33	32	37	55	58	19	5.3
Missouri	7.6	8.1	27	102	35	522	11	9	19	26	45	38	34	10	9.0
Montana	6.2	7.4	26	82	22	72	6	7	18	24	43	31	29	8	3.8
Nebraska	6.1	7.7	26	66	24	180	6	5	13	19	47	34	30	3	1.9
Nevada	7.6	6.5	34	74	47	401	12	11	16	26	46	N.A.	43	15	17.1
New Hampshire	5.1	6.2	20	41	15	128	7	6	9	22	37	30	N.A.	8	5.4
New Jersey	7.6	7.7	25	35	26	736	6	7	14	24	33	35	32	10	7.3
New Mexico	7.3	8.3	32	84	52	431	11	11	29	27	44	51	49	19	7.0

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New York	7.6	7.8	25	56	30	1,082	8	10	25	30	37	43	36	17	7.3
North Carolina	8.7	10.0	32	78	44	445	11	10	21	27	42	41	36	14	8.3
North Dakota	5.4	7.2	27	75	15	105	5	5	14	19	46	27	25	5	1.6
Ohio	7.5	8.7	27	47	34	409	7	8	19	25	41	N.A.	N.A.	10	6.6
Oklahoma	7.0	8.5	32	83	41	359	9	9	24	24	46	N.A.	N.A.	11	7.0
Oregon	5.3	7.1	25	56	30	356	11	9	16	24	37	N.A.	35	9	8.3
Pennsylvania	7.4	8.2	27	49	28	845	8	9	17	22	40	39	32	10	7.4
Rhode Island	6.5	5.0	26	19	32	529	8	7	18	28	32	35	39	18	17.0
South Carolina	9.2	9.3	39	75	46	397	11	11	26	29	35	52	52	19	6.9
South Dakota	5.9	9.6	31	82	23	262	8	6	18	20	47	N.A.	N.A.	8	5.3
Tennessee	8.8	8.9	33	91	43	316	10	11	23	29	50	42	42	14	13.1
Texas	7.0	7.1	29	75	52	427	13	11	25	24	42	42	31	22	11.6
Utah	5.9	6.2	28	74	25	357	7	6	12	14	41	36	31	4	4.0
Vermont	6.0	7.5	21	47	17	40	6	7	13	22	39	N.A.	33	5	3.3
Virginia	7.5	8.3	27	63	31	264	9	8	13	23	42	43	38	11	6.4
Washington	5.3	6.2	28	54	29	430	8	10	15	24	42	41	33	6	7.7
West Virginia	7.5	6.7	27	49	33	78	13	17	28	25	55	42	37	15	5.0
Wisconsin	6.4	7.9	24	56	23	432	5	7	14	23	43	29	26	8	3.3
Wyoming	8.8	6.7	24	103	25	117	8	9	13	22	46	32	36	5	1.3

Note: All data are for 1994, unless otherwise indicated. N.A.= Not available

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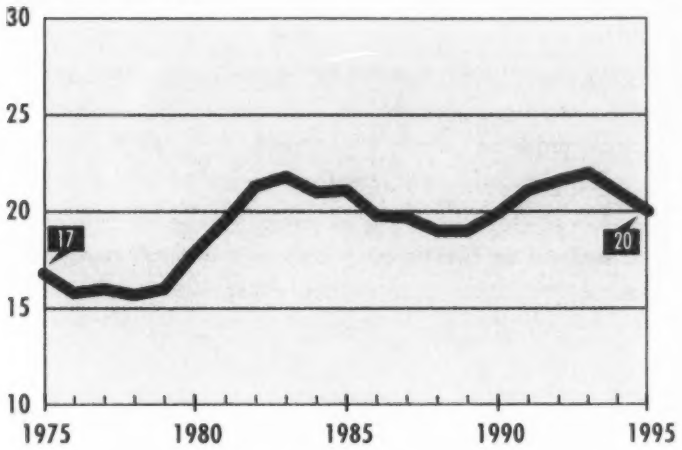
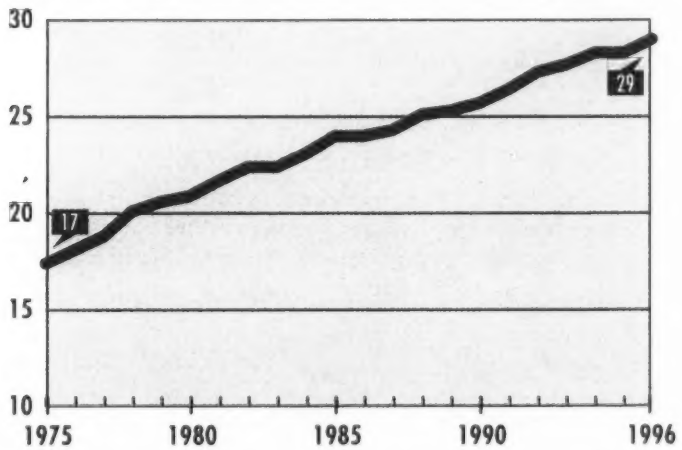
Percent of Children in Poverty, 1975–1995



The percentage of children in poverty has been at or above 20 percent throughout the 1990s. It was 20 percent in 1995.

Percent Families with Children Under 18 Headed by Single Parent, 1975–1996



The percentage of single-parent families with children has increased steadily, rising from 17 percent in 1975 to 29 percent in 1996.

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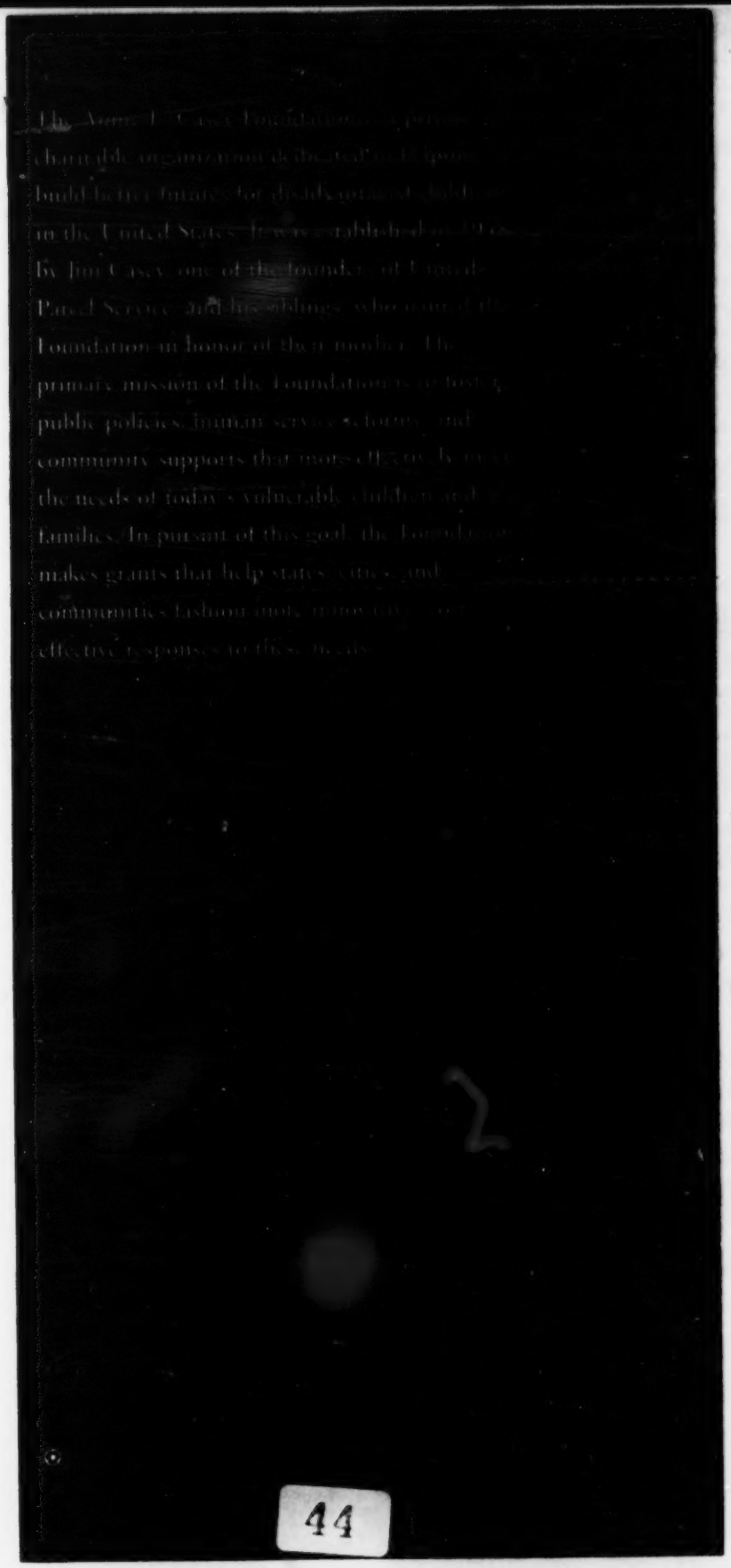

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School Readiness

- School Readiness
- Small Schools
- Standards
- Family Participation
- School-Community Partnerships
- Decentralization
- Professional Development
- School-Based Accountability
- Innovations and Experiments

The Concept

The first national education goal for the year 2000 is guaranteeing that all children enter school ready to learn—and for good reason. To get a solid shot at success in school, children must come to kindergarten prepared. Early-childhood education is just part of the broader intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development children need to succeed in the crucial elementary grades. Family and other community supports play vital roles in ensuring that young children grow up in healthy environments that nurture this continuous development.

With these realizations, however, has come an awareness in recent years that too many children lack these basic foundations. An increasing number of children—particularly those living in poverty—are starting school without the verbal, mathematical, and basic life skills they need to learn at high levels. A recent study found that 3- to 5-year-olds from families earning more than $75,000 a year were almost twice as likely to attend preschool as their peers with annual family incomes of less than $30,000. More than ever, the American family today needs a helping hand from schools, health clinics, child-care facilities, public welfare institutions, businesses, and religious organizations.

While there can be no substitute for a strong family environment, we can enhance school readiness through high-quality, accessible supports. No reliable national safety net currently exists. For example, Head Start, which is designed to prepare 3- and 4-year-olds across the country for school, reaches only about one-fifth of eligible children. But various programs are emerging and showing some success, such as Reach Out and Read, a national initiative, and North Carolina's Smart Start. Both programs are designed to combine access to excellent and affordable health care, child care, and the educational services every child needs to succeed.

Ideas in Action

Reach Out and Read

Reach Out and Read was developed in 1989 by a group of pediatricians and early-childhood educators who wanted to make early-literacy development part of pediatric primary care.

The program, which has three components, makes reading and books a part of every doctor visit for children ages 6 months to 6 years. First, volunteers in each of the 88 participating doctors' offices and clinic waiting rooms across the country read aloud to children as they wait for their appointments. Then, during the check-up, pediatricians who are trained to counsel parents about the importance of reading with young children offer tips for making books a regular part of the family's routine. Children are asked to read a developmentally appropriate book, and pediatricians evaluate children's progress in speaking and reading. Finally, at the end of every check-up, each child receives a new book to take home.

Doctors and early-childhood educators hope that Reach Out and Read will combat problems often associated with limited literacy skills, including school failure, juvenile delinquency, and teenage pregnancy. The results are promising: A recent evaluation that compared families in the program with those who weren't shows that parents whose children received books through the program were four times more likely to look at books with their children than were parents who didn't participate. In addition, parents who participated in the program and received welfare assistance were eight times more likely to share books with their children than were parents who weren't in the program.

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Smart Start

The Smart Start program, developed in 1993 by North Carolina Governor Jim Hunt, aims to give every child in the state the proper health care, child care, and other critical services they need to enter school healthy and ready to succeed.

Smart Start is a comprehensive private-public initiative where communities pool their resources as well as their best ideas and practices to provide a safety net for children who might otherwise not have one. The program is based on the belief that in order for children to become successful teachers, parents, community members, and workers, they need a healthy, supported start. Research has shown that quality child care is a predictor of academic success, adjustment to a school setting, and appropriate social behavior throughout life.

Smart Start helps address families' child-care needs. The program assists families who cannot pay for child care and helps provide transportation. Smart Start also provides training for child care center staff and helps increase the size of facilities to allow for additional children, including those with disabilities.

In addition, Smart Start improves families' access to preventive health care. The program provides immunizations and transportation to check-ups, particularly for children in rural areas. Many Smart Start sites offer screenings to assess the development of children's vision, hearing, teeth, and speech.

Finally, Smart Start provides education and training to parents and families on topics such as child health and nutrition. Family literacy programs are provided to help parents learn to read so that they can help their children learn.

For More Information

Head Start Bureau
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
PO Box 1182
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(202) 205-8572
www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/hsb/
Contact: Helen Taylor, Associate Commissioner

Reach Out and Read National Training Center
Boston Medical Center
1 BMC Place, Dowling 5 South
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(617) 534-5701
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North Carolina Partnership for Children
1323 Capital Boulevard
Suite 102
Raleigh, NC 27603
(919) 821-7999
www.smartstart-nc.org
Contact: Karen Ponder, Program Director

Carnegie Corporation of New York
Starting Points: Meeting the Needs of Our Youngest Children, 1994
437 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10022
(212) 371-3200

Family Resource Coalition
200 S. Michigan Avenue
Chicago, IL 60604
(312) 341-0900
Contact: Linda Turner, Membership Services Coordinator

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
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Parents as Teachers National Center, Inc.
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Small Schools

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The Concept

School consolidation was once one of the United States' most widespread reform movements—between 1940 and 1990, the number of schools dropped nearly 70 percent, and average enrollment rose fivefold. Some urban high schools swelled to more than 3,000 students. But a growing body of evidence shows that small schools work better than large schools for students, teachers, and parents. As a result, improving the quality of education by creating small schools has become an increasingly popular solution to the failure of jumbo schools in cities such as Chicago, Denver, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, and Seattle.

The rationale behind creating large schools was to offer more resources and a wider curriculum to students while taking advantage of economies of scale. In reality, large schools and high enrollment often create impersonal, institutional environments that make students feel alienated. Teachers report feeling powerless; parents are disenfranchised. Moreover, bureaucracy and centralization make change difficult.

Small schools, on the other hand, offer more personal, individualized education. They tend to provide more attention to student needs and to hold students to higher academic expectations. Researchers in New Jersey and Chicago have found that aside from socioeconomic status, small school size is the factor most consistently related to higher grades and test scores, fewer suspensions and dropouts, and better rates of employment and college attendance after graduation.

Studies show that both students and teachers in small schools around the country enjoy a greater sense of belonging. Teachers have more time for each student, so they can better address a child's strengths and weaknesses. Students become active learners, ready to tackle complex problems and challenging coursework. Data show that females, nonwhites, and lower income children perform better in small schools, as do most special-needs students.

Teachers in small schools tend to have more decision-making power and more resources for professional development. They are encouraged to work collaboratively and to use educational approaches that fit the particular student body, paving the way for innovative instruction. Small schools also benefit parents, who tend to become more involved in the school community and their children's learning.

Small schools may be created as separate institutions, but often, existing large school buildings are divided into autonomous subunits, known as schools-within-schools, mini-schools, houses, learning communities, or clusters. Often, the same group of students and teachers spends several years together in these small, personal learning environments.

Ideas in Action

In many large cities, the small schools movement is just beginning to get off the ground. Chicago's transition to small schools began at the grassroots level, spurred by teachers and local school councils. In Philadelphia, the current transition to small schools has its roots in a 1988 districtwide plan. Today, hundreds of small learning communities are being created within the city's 22 high schools, each characterized by a diverse student population and teacher-based decision making.

In New York City, the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE) and New Visions for Public Schools are working collaboratively to create small schools to serve as models for districts across the country.

CCE's Campus Coalition replaced two large, failing high schools with two "educational complexes" that contain a total of 10 small schools, as well as medical and social services

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for students and neighborhood residents. New Visions started by asking 15,000 community organizations, parents, individuals, cultural groups, and civic and educational institutions for ideas on what makes a good public school.

Themes at New Visions Schools range from mathematics, health care, technology, and the arts to middle-school reform, multiculturalism, and civic involvement. El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice features an extended day program, community service options, a health and wellness clinic, and a college/career counseling program. For students interested in expeditionary learning, the School for the Physical City offers studies related to rebuilding and rehabilitating the city's infrastructure. Students at the school apprentice with engineers, architects, contractors, carpenters, and others while learning a comprehensive curriculum.

Enrollment at New Visions Schools is capped at 700 students, and the schools feature rigorous academics and high standards in supportive learning environments. Instruction strategies minimize lectures and encourage team teaching and student-developed projects. Students and teachers are drawn from throughout the city. Schools select faculty whose skills and interests are compatible. Parents and community members are involved in classrooms and on school councils.

The impact of the program already is apparent: New Visions Schools have outstanding attendance, retention, and pass rates, and they are developing promising alternatives to tracking students by achievement levels. The success of this initiative is influencing the way people think about and create small public school communities that work.

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ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education
Taking Stock: The Movement to Create Mini-Schools, Schools-Within-Schools, and Separate Small Schools, by Mary Anne Raywid, 1996
Box 40, Teachers College
Columbia University
New York, NY 10027
(800) 601-4868
http://eric-ir.syr.edu
Contact: Erwin Flaxman,
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Small Schools Workshop
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College of Education
The University of Illinois at Chicago
115 S. Sangamon
Third Floor
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Teachers College Press
Chartering Urban School Reform, Chapter 1, by Michelle Fine, 1994
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Standards

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The Concept

The concept of higher academic standards for all children is driving much of the debate about school improvement at all levels—national, state, and local. Public opinion polls consistently show that higher standards are a top priority for parents, students, business leaders, community leaders, and the general public. President Clinton, building on previous efforts by former President George Bush, has made voluntary national standards the centerpiece of his education agenda. State governments, school-reform organizations, business-school partnerships, foundations, community organizations—all have made higher standards the starting point for their work.

For most communities, this is a new concept. Traditionally, only the top 20 percent to 25 percent of American students have been held to high standards of performance. These were the students who took college-level, Advanced Placement courses and applied for admission into the top 50 or so elite colleges and universities.

But school systems have held much lower expectations for the remaining students, who have tended to be offered easy courses and tracked too quickly into non-college-bound programs. As research by the Education Trust and others has shown, minority and poor students were disproportionately left behind in this two-tiered system. As long as these students stayed in school, they received a diploma for the equivalent of only about a 7th or 8th grade education. Until recently, that was good enough for high school graduates to get a decent job and earn a middle-class wage. No longer.

Intensifying economic competition means even assembly-line jobs these days require people with a high level of knowledge and skills—and the ability to put that knowledge to work in solving complex problems. Hence, the call is for public schools to do a better job of preparing more students, not just the elite few, for this more complex and challenging society.

Standards, which publicly set out what students are expected to know and be able to do, transform everything else about schooling. Assessments that go beyond fill-in-the-blank, multiple-choice tests are needed to more accurately measure whether students are meeting the more rigorous standards. Tougher courses and better instructional materials are needed to help prepare students for these tests. School staffs need better training in order to teach these tougher courses. Administrators, in turn, are having to rethink schedules, professional development, budgets, and governance structures in order to give school staffs the tools they need to teach well. And the public, who pays for this system of public education, is demanding greater accountability for results. Are our students doing well enough? If not, why not, and what are the schools doing to improve?

Ideas in Action

Questions like these are being addressed with increased frequency. Virtually every state in the country is revamping its academic standards and replacing its minimum-competency requirements with higher expectations. The most dramatic transformation is occurring in Kentucky, where a 1989 ruling by the state Supreme Court ordered top-to-bottom restructuring of the state's entire system. In response, Kentucky adopted much more rigorous standards; is using new statewide tests to measure student performance; is rewarding or sanctioning schools based on those test scores; and has introduced a wide range of supports for students, families, and staff to help more children achieve at higher levels. Colorado, Maryland, and Washington are undertaking similar kinds of standards-based reforms.

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At the local level, cities such as Charlotte, NC; Edmonds, WA; Long Beach, CA; Milwaukee, WI; New York, NY; and Philadelphia, PA, also are using higher standards as the lever to totally reorganize and improve their systems. In September 1996, the Philadelphia school board unanimously adopted new standards in math, English, the arts, and science, as well as a set of crosscutting standards in communication, problem solving, school-to-career, and multiculturalism. Teams are now crafting standards for social studies, foreign language, and physical and health education, as well as competencies in technology.

The standards-setting teams include teachers, curriculum specialists, parents, and business and community leaders. These teams draft standards for the district based on existing national, state, and local standards. After the drafts have been reviewed by school and community representatives, the teams revise the standards and submit them to the school board for final approval.

Meanwhile, the district has begun administering the Stanford 9 Achievement Test to all students in grades 2, 4, 6, 8, and 11. The national test was chosen because it combines multiple-choice and open-ended tasks. Student performance on these tests is one of the indicators that the district is using to hold schools accountable for continuous improvement.

For More Information

The Education Trust
Front End Alignment: Using Standards to Steer Educational Change, by Ruth Mitchell, 1996
1 Dupont Circle, NW
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Washington, DC 20036-1110
(202) 293-1217
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Council for Basic Education
Judging Standards in Education Reform, 1996
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(202) 347-4171
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ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education
Can Performance-Based Assessments Improve Urban Schooling? by Carol Ascher, 1990
Box 40
Teachers College
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(800) 601-4868
http://ericir.syr.edu
Contact: Erwin Flaxman, Director

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Family Participation

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- Innovations and Experiments

The Concept

Family participation is critical to students' academic success. Research shows that parent involvement improves students' achievement, school programs, and the school environment. It also increases parents' role in helping their children learn and can make teachers more effective in their work.

Today, every child must leave school with more knowledge and a greater skill level than ever before. Many schools, therefore, are taking action to engage families, both at home and in the school. This outreach is essential; studies show that when teachers guide involvement and interaction, more parents become involved in ways that benefit their children. In addition, surveys indicate that parents want to encourage and guide their children as students, but need more information about how to do so.

Family involvement can take many forms. Schools, for example, can help families support children as students by suggesting ways to support learning at home and providing programs to help families with health, nutrition, or other concerns. They also can help parents improve their own education through GED or family literacy programs.

Parents can get more involved with children's schoolwork at home, volunteer at the school, and participate in making critical school decisions. Teachers can show families how to help students with homework and other curriculum-related activities. Many teachers do so with family math, science, and reading activities at school.

Together, schools and parents can improve school-home communications about children's progress and school programs. They also can increase the use of community services—such as health, social support, or recreational services—to strengthen student development.

Ideas in Action

The Alliance Schools Project

The Alliance Schools Project is grounded in the belief that schools should engage parents to the point where they take responsibility for—and action that results in—changing their schools to meet their children's needs. The Alliance, established in 1992, is a partnership among the Texas Interfaith Education Fund (TIEF), the Texas Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) network, the Texas State Education Agency, school district administrators, school staff, and parents.

Alliance Schools have achieved impressive results in impoverished schools by working with parents and focusing on academic achievement. Under the Alliance model, parents become equal partners with teachers, principals, and district administrators to help make decisions about their schools. Teachers gain new flexibility to pursue effective teaching methods, curriculum, and assessment strategies. And schools take on new programs—such as after-school recreation, tutoring programs, parenting centers, and health clinics—to meet children's non-academic needs.

In Ysleta Elementary School in El Paso, an Alliance-driven leadership team of parents, teachers, administrators, and community leaders has expanded parental involvement to improve student achievement. When the team designed a portfolio assessment system, for example, teachers held parent training sessions that explained the system and gave parents an opportunity to comment on it. Teachers held family math nights and tutoring workshops. Ysleta staff, teachers, and parents designed an after-school enrichment program, which parents now run. The school also boasts a Parent Resource Center, where parents come to attend adult classes, check out books and tapes for their children, and help teachers prepare materials for the classroom.

The hard work has paid off where it counts most: improved student performance. Attendance rates have climbed each year and now are above average for the district and the state. Since 1992, the number of students

passing all portions of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test has increased 38 percentage points.

Comer School Development Program

The Comer School Development Program puts children's needs at the center of school planning and management. The program is in place at 600 schools in 20 states, the District of Columbia, Trinidad, Tobago, and England. The program unites adults in each school—teachers, administrators, support staff, and parents—and helps them work together. School planning is collaborative and focuses on solving problems rather than placing blame.

Three bodies manage each school. The School Planning and Management Team—which includes parents, teachers, administrators, support staff, and, in middle and high schools, students—creates a Comprehensive School Plan that includes academic achievement goals. It also addresses staff development and assesses school progress. The Parent Team works to involve parents, and the Mental Health (or Student Services) Team addresses social service issues.

When compared with their districts as a whole, Comer schools demonstrate lower absenteeism and suspension rates—and stronger academic achievement gains, as measured by standardized and state mastery test scores.

For More Information

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Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning
School/Family/Community Partnerships: Caring for the Children We Share, by Joyce Epstein, 1995
Johns Hopkins University
3505 N. Charles Street
Baltimore, MD 21218
(410) 516-8808
Contact: Joyce Epstein, Co-Director

Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence
PO Box 1658
Lexington, KY 40592
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U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services
Together We Can: A Guide for Crafting a Pro-Family System of Education and Human Services, by Atelia Melaville and Martin Blank, 1993
(202) 822-8405
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School-Community Partnerships

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The Concept

Virtually every American city has neighborhoods with chronic, pervasive problems such as substance abuse and crime. Within these communities—usually economically poor—millions of children and families face a combination of circumstances that not only threaten their immediate well-being, but also put them at risk of long-term disadvantage. These communities lack ready access to employment training or to educational, counseling, recreational, health, and other services. Furthermore, they often lack effective community organizations, making it difficult to mount campaigns against violence, drugs, and related problems.

It is becoming increasingly important for schools to work with other community agencies to address these multiple social needs. The concept behind school-community partnerships is that the problems faced by children and families living in such communities are simply too large and too complex to be taken on alone or by any one system, particularly schools. Supporters of school-community partnerships commonly refer to the need for a "full-court press" to address problems of distressed communities.

Breaking the cycle of disadvantage requires increased collaboration among services. Thousands of school-community collaborations have sprung up in cities across the country. They offer programs, services, and resources to students, and sometimes their families, and involve new actors in school decision making about ways to best support kids.

School-community partnerships are intended to ensure better coordination and delivery of services by schools and various public and private human service agencies and often act as a source of aid and referrals for families who need assistance. Often referred to as community schools, programs such as Kentucky's Family Resource and Youth Services Centers, the Beacon School-Based Community Centers in New York, and the Vaughn Family Center in Los Angeles are designed to promote the flow of resources and support to families.

Ideas in Action

Beacons

The Beacons program offers an integrated strategy to help students and their families. Developed in New York City in 1991 as an effort to reduce drug use and to provide young people with constructive alternatives to life on the streets, the Beacons program converts local school buildings into active community centers for use after school, on weekends, and during the summer. The Beacons program aims to keep schools open seven days a week, 16 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Community agencies use space in Beacon schools to provide numerous services such as education, employment training and counseling, and cultural and recreational activities for students and their families. The intent is not only to offer services, but also to use schools as a vehicle to spur community development.

One of the first to be set up, the Red Hook Beacon is located in a section of Brooklyn characterized by physical and social isolation. The 680-acre peninsula is surrounded on three sides by water and is cut off from the rest of Brooklyn by expressways. Three-fourths of its residents live in one of the city's oldest and largest housing projects. In a neighborhood plagued by poverty, drugs, and crime, the Red Hook Beacon is working to support individual, family, and community growth.

The mission of the Red Hook Beacon is to create a space where people of all ages can come together to strengthen the community and promote leadership and sharing among

youth and adults. This Beacon offers a wide variety of activities and programs, including an after-school center for 1st through 6th graders; a computer center, available to both children and adults, that offers IBM computers and classes to learn computer skills; a newspaper club; weekly family nights planned by parents; athletic leagues for adolescents; and a variety of counseling and social services.

The Countee Cullen Community Center Beacon is collaborating with P.S. 194 on an Academic Continuum program for youths in the neighborhood. The continuum targets youths from the 3rd grade and up who are a year behind in their math and reading scores. The youths receive after-school tutoring and instruction in both areas.

Strengthening families by providing support, services, encouragement, and options is a central theme of the Beacon. The school offers parents individual and group counseling, support groups, informational sessions, parenting workshops, and a safe place to gather for cultural and recreational activities. Parents are recruited for the program by other parents who feel they have gained skills and support through their involvement.

The Countee Cullen Beacon also is able to offer more intensive supports to troubled families who have the least resources to meet their children's needs. The family support services are directed toward preventing out-of-home placement by providing family support and social services to families whose children are at risk of abuse or neglect or who consider their adolescent child unmanageable. The families receive emergency help; clinical services; home visits; counseling; and practical help in finding housing, jobs, or child care.

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Beacon School-Based Community Centers
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Vaughn Family Center
13330 Vaughn Street
San Fernando, CA 91340
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Carnegie Corporation of New York
A Matter of Time: Risk and Opportunity in the Out-of-School Hours, 1994
437 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10022
(212) 371-3200

Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform
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Decentralization

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The Concept

Convinced that oversized central school bureaucracies are incapable of focusing on improved outcomes for students and encouraged by a wave of decentralization in business organizations in the 1990s, people working to improve schools have turned to reducing the control that central offices have over school funds, authority, and accountability.

It is widely held that student success depends on whether schools have high standards, are small enough so that students and teachers can know each other well, and are held accountable for results. But if they are to be held accountable for results, schools and their communities say they have to be able to decide what and how they will teach to meet high district standards, who they will hire, how they will spend their funds, and how they will use their buildings. Teachers, parents, and community members in decentralized schools are now part of the process of determining how their tax dollars will be spent and what will be done to enhance educational opportunities.

Despite the appeal of decentralization, changes are difficult to accomplish. Even when decision-making groups in schools have a variety of constituents, some find that many people still feel left out. Ultimately, the success of decentralized schools depends on whether people know what they're supposed to achieve, how it will be measured, and what freedom or flexibility they have in operating. As school staffs learn to operate under markedly new conditions, the need for training in areas of decision making and operations, as well as other educational areas, has rapidly increased.

Although no one model exists for decentralization, urban systems such as Charlotte, Chicago, Cincinnati, Denver, Los Angeles, and Seattle have initiated changes in the roles and missions of school boards, superintendents, and central offices. They hope these changes will encourage greater initiative, creativity, and attention to student and community needs.

In Chicago, Denver, and Philadelphia, local school site councils share authority for school decisions among a large number of people, all of whom have a stake in the school. In these districts, it is often not just the principal's perspective from the front office that guides decision making, but teachers' perspectives from classrooms and hallways and parents' perspectives from homes, neighborhoods, and businesses as well.

Ideas in Action

Edmonton Public Schools

Although school reformers have long discussed school-based management and local school councils as critical education-reform elements, few systems have moved real governing power to individual schools and left it there. Likewise, even when schools are given the right to make their own decisions, they are generally not given the budget authority to back them up.

The Edmonton Public Schools system, in the Canadian province of Alberta, is an exception. Grounded in the belief that student achievement should be at the center of all decisions, the Edmonton district has put its money where its mouth is. In the 1996-1997 school year, 80 percent of the system's $405 million budget is going directly to schools. Using a system that has been refined continually over the past 17 years, the district weights allocations based on student needs, with an emphasis on getting more money to schools that need it most.

Budget decisions are made closest to where teaching and learning take place. Schools select and purchase the instructional, leadership, technical, facility-related, and other services they need. Schools receive their budget in a single lump sum. In addition to services, they decide the number of staff to hire

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and the amount of money to spend for supplies, equipment, and utilities required to provide the best possible program for all students.

An entrepreneurial central office competes with vendors and other outside agencies to provide services such as professional development to schools. Schools can choose not to purchase services from the central office either because they prefer an outside vendor or because they find the service unnecessary.

Denver Public Schools

Denver is perhaps the only district in the United States to institutionalize school-based decision making and parent-community involvement as district policy. A labor dispute in 1991 between teachers and the school board resulted in a teachers' contract that mandated that school site decisions be made by teams of people working at individual schools.

Driven by a common goal to improve student achievement, collaborative decision-making teams (CDMs) develop improvement plans for each of the district's 110 schools and then decide how the schools will reach those plans. CDMs have authority to schedule teachers' time; determine instructional delivery, school budgets, instructional support, curriculum structure and implementation, school climate, and safety and security; manage communications; and select new faculty. The school board and superintendent retain control over district goals and maintain academic and achievement standards. But how schools reach these standards is up to them.

CDMs consist of the school principal, four teachers, one classified employee, four parents, and a representative of the business community. With the exception of business participants, which are chosen by the CDM, each representative is elected by his or her peers.

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Consortium on Chicago School Research
"Cross-Site Analysis of School System Decentralization," by Paul Hill and Anthony Bryk, unpublished
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Reinventing the Central Office, by Anne Hallett, 1995
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On Tapping the Power of School-Based Management, by Mike Strembitsky (former superintendent of Edmonton Public Schools)
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Professional Development

The Concept

Students today must have more skills and broader knowledge than ever before. To meet this need, schools must do more than offer education; they must ensure learning. Teachers, who in the past were expected only to "cover the curriculum," now must help every student achieve a higher academic standard.

What teachers know and can do makes a crucial difference in what children learn. And teachers with access to peer networks, enriched professional roles, and collegial work feel better about their work. Many schools, therefore, are focusing increasing attention and resources on in-service professional development for teachers.

In-service development programs vary from district to district, but effective programs share common ground. They are viewed as an integral part of teachers' work instead of an add-on activity or afterthought. They are teacher-driven and allow teachers to work together, rethink teaching strategies, learn new subject matter, and stay current in their fields. Finally, they allow adequate time for inquiry and reflection.

To meet this need, some schools have changed their schedules to create common planning time for teachers or early-release days for students that allow teachers to work collaboratively. Others have restructured around small, cohesive units, such as teaching teams or clusters, that allow teachers to share responsibility for designing and evaluating student work. In some districts, community volunteers teach academic mini-units so teams of teachers can be released from their classrooms to work together.

Ideas in Action

Mayerson Academy for Human Resource Development

The Mayerson Academy for Human Resource Development in Cincinnati provides quality professional development for teachers, principals, and others in the Cincinnati School District in a corporate, state-of-the-art setting. Professional and leadership development courses—including programs in effective instruction, classroom management, teaming, and support—are offered during the school day, on weekends, and in the evenings. The academy combines national consultants with local talent, so high-quality teachers from Cincinnati schools can share their ideas, methods, and experience with their peers.

The academy operates as a non-profit organization, independent of the school district. Started in 1993 with an endowment from the business community, the academy now operates self-sufficiently by contracting its services to the Cincinnati schools as well as to various suburban districts.

Teacher and leadership course offerings at the academy have for the most part replaced all of the professional development offered by the Cincinnati district. Teachers who take courses at the academy are able to upgrade their teaching certificates and receive graduate school credits. The academy also is working toward providing schoolwide initiatives; school teams will help design tailored professional development programs that give teachers the skills they need to implement school improvement plans.

The facility, located in a former junior high school, uses fiber optics, rear-screen projection, and distance learning both on- and off-site to provide training, follow-up, and coaching. A teacher resource center is planned, which will give educators access to high-technology solutions and resources, such as online district and national curriculum and assessment information, and tools to create multimedia classroom materials.

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- Standards
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- School-Community Partnerships
- Decentralization
- **Professional Development**
- School-Based Accountability
- Innovations and Experiments

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Chicago Teachers Union Quest Center

The Chicago Teachers Union Quest Center is a resource for teachers working to implement strategies for change—both in their schools and in their own professional development. More than 50 schools are part of the Quest program, which offers conferences, workshops, and professional development courses tailored to meet a school's specific needs.

Founded on the belief that professional development should be designed by the teachers who will use it, Quest strives to design programs that answer teachers' questions about current issues ranging from the city's new standards requirements to professional licensing.

While the Quest Center is a resource for all of Chicago's schools, the program's closest ties are with its member schools, all of which submitted proposals outlining innovative ideas that teachers wanted to execute. Once a school becomes part of the program, the center works with the staff to focus the strategic plan and implement it for the entire school.

The Quest program provides the level of assistance that each school needs. The center is most involved with a core group of 16 schools, in which Quest staff become part of the team that is implementing change. Through weekly phone contact and monthly site visits, Quest offers expertise, advice, and resources for more information.

Most Quest schools have restructured their schedules to allow at least a half-day per month for teachers to participate in professional development. Quest helps them maximize this time with a teacher-to-teacher model. Every teacher who learns through the Quest program is taught—and encouraged—to train others.

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National Commission on Teaching and America's Future
What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future, 1996
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Partnership for Kentucky Schools
Realizing New Learning for All Students: A Framework for the Professional Development of Kentucky Teachers, by G. Williamson McDiarmid, 1994
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Policies That Support Professional Development in an Era of Reform, by Linda Darling-Hammond and Milbrey McLaughlin, Phi Delta Kappan, April 1995
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School-Based Accountability

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- Professional Development
- **School-Based Accountability**
- Innovations and Experiments

The Concept

Americans want some guarantee that schools are helping children learn all they need to know. Thus, a handful of state and local public education systems have launched accountability initiatives in recent years to ensure school improvement. Though specific strategies vary, school-based accountability programs generally promise rewards or sanctions for schools—depending on their progress toward rigorous standards for student achievement—along with public reports of each individual school's performance.

The logic behind accountability is simple: Students, parents, employers, and others both demand and deserve some assurance that public education prepares young people for the world of challenges they will face after high school. Accountability secures better results for America's children.

The benefits of accountability are becoming apparent at all levels. Policymakers say it helps align educational practice with local and state standards and constitutional requirements to provide adequate educational opportunities for all children. Educators say it helps them leverage increased local authority and support for schools.

More and more, teachers and their unions are working with district leaders to fashion accountability systems. Bonus grants and public recognition await schools that demonstrate top-notch achievement, low dropout rates, and other positive outcomes. Schools that temporarily falter may receive assistance tailored to build local capacity for teaching and learning. But schools that consistently fail to meet important benchmarks may be taken over and reconstituted with new staff.

While a few school systems have kicked off efforts to hold schools accountable—Kentucky, Philadelphia, and Maryland, for example—even these pioneering initiatives remain controversial works-in-progress. Many school systems are struggling with the complex problem of creating incentives and penalties that are both powerful and fair. Critics charge that schools cannot fairly be held accountable unless the playing field is leveled so that all schools receive equal, adequate resources. Even with additional resources, others complain, schools are punished for circumstances beyond their control, such as the poverty and parental neglect that hinder many students. In the end, such difficult issues must be resolved to create sound systems of accountability.

Ideas in Action

A handful of states and major urban districts are taking on new challenges in their quest for more accountable public schools:

Kentucky's incentive system—the **Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS)**—ties rewards to continuous school improvement. Mandated by state law in 1990, KIRIS provides the prototype for many other accountability systems nationwide. Schools whose test scores exceed targets set by the state receive grants that they can spend however they want, such as for resources or teacher bonuses. Those that fall short of goals draw up improvement plans, receive special assistance, and, if they keep declining, may face state intervention. To ease concerns about unfairly penalizing schools that must educate a disproportionate number of disadvantaged students, the reforms also provide additional support for preschool programs and family resource centers.

The **School District of Philadelphia's accountability program** sets targets for school improvement at 2-year intervals beyond 1996, when the district used test scores and other statistics to calculate schools'

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baseline scores. Under the new Professional Responsibility System, top-performing schools will become eligible for monetary awards in 1998, while schools that miss targets may face reconstitution—and the forced transfer of three-quarters of their staff—by 2000. District leaders have only partly defused widespread tensions about accountability by working closely with teachers, parents, employers, and other community members to set criteria for evaluating schools.

New York City has established tough high school graduation requirements, including enrollment in challenging math and science courses. In 1996 schools began administering more rigorous Regents examinations, which are being aligned with new state standards in seven subjects. Largely in response to teachers' complaints that the standards lack specificity, state officials are creating curriculum guides for classroom activities. This past fall, the state stepped up its scrutiny of schools unable to get 90 percent of students to pass assessments; schools that fail to meet the aspirations outlined in corrective-action plans may be reorganized or closed.

The **Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP),** launched in 1991, currently tests 3rd, 5th, and 8th graders to measure school performance. In the past three years, 42 of the state's 1,263 schools have been reconstituted based on MSPAP scores. Maryland officials, with input from business and higher education leaders, are planning a test to evaluate high school seniors in 10 content areas. Officials plan to use the assessment to determine whether students graduate, beginning with the Class of 2004. Because resistance to the graduation requirement among students and parents is expected to mount as 2004 approaches, officials already have begun laying groundwork for broad public awareness and "buy in" regarding accountability.

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Innovations and Experiments

The Concept

Revitalizing public education has become a priority in the United States, and educators, legislators, and parents have embarked on new, innovative, and often experimental paths—particularly when traditional reform approaches prove ineffective or lack support. Many of these innovative strategies strive to shift accountability from centralized bureaucracies to local schools and to create educational options. These initiatives often target urban school districts and low-income children, who are most at risk of failing to achieve at high levels, and they aim to empower teachers, parents, students, and community members.

Several types of innovations and experiments are receiving increasing national attention, including theme- or curriculum-based school reform networks, charter schools, school choice, and public-private partnerships. Below are some examples.

Ideas in Action

Networks

Networks are groups of schools, often in different parts of the country, that are organized around a particular curriculum or theme. Most networks are led by an organization that oversees schools' work and provides technical assistance where needed.

The **Coalition of Essential Schools** is one of the largest networks in the country, encompassing nearly 1,000 K-12 schools in 32 states. This grassroots movement, which was formed in 1984, is based on the research of educator and school reform leader Theodore (Ted) Sizer, focusing on Sizer's nine principles, a set of common-sense ideas for successful school practice.

The **Accelerated Schools Project** was developed by Henry Levin of Stanford University and aims to give all students the kind of fast-paced, engaging curriculum usually reserved for gifted-and-talented programs. Coursework emphasizes problem-solving techniques, concepts, analyses, and applications. Parents, students, and teachers set goals together.

Roots and Wings, part of the New American Schools partnership (see "Public-Private Partnerships," below) is a design for elementary schools based on the Success for All reading program. Roots and Wings schools aim to provide as much support as necessary to make sure at-risk students succeed. "Roots" refers to the initiative's emphasis on mastering the basics, while "wings" represents advanced accomplishments.

Charter Schools

Some 25 states have adopted charter legislation, most of which aim to give parents educational options, allow entrepreneurial opportunities for educators, and promote accountability from schools and fair competition for public school districts.

Charter school legislation allows groups other than public school districts to start and operate schools within the public school system. The strongest legislation allows these groups—usually teachers, parents, or other community members—to be sponsored by a local school board or some other public body. State per-pupil funding allocation follows the students who enroll.

Charters must be public, non-sectarian, and tuition-free and cannot require admissions tests. They are legal entities with their own elected boards, and they generally sign 3- to 5-year contracts that spell out academic targets. If the schools fail to reach these targets, they lose their charters and are closed. In return for this accountability, the state waives many rules and regulations that apply to public schools.

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School Choice

School choice allows parents to choose which K-12 school their children attend. Many school reformers believe choice should be aimed at low-income parents whose children must often attend inadequate, under-funded, sometimes crime-ridden public schools in poor areas. Some argue that choice makes educators accountable for better meeting the needs of parents and students and makes schools compete with each other, forcing them to meet higher standards or close.

In practice, school choice usually takes one of two forms. Districtwide, or intradistrict, choice lets parents decide among any public school in their home district. Statewide, or interdistrict, choice means students can attend public schools outside their home district.

Cambridge, MA, initiated an intradistrict plan in 1981 that allows parents to choose among any elementary or middle school in the city. Cambridge's plan is an example of "controlled choice," in which transfers are allowed only if they do not harm racial integration efforts. Today, 85 percent of Cambridge students attend public schools, up from 70 percent when the plan was implemented, and test scores have improved.

New York City's District #4 in East Harlem requires students to select the junior high school they wish to attend. Students may choose from among 25 different schools, each of which focuses on a particular theme and academic program. Since the program was implemented in 1983, reading proficiency, math achievement, and attendance have improved.

In another variation of school choice, education advocates have proposed scholarships (also known as vouchers) that allow parents to use public funds to send their children to private schools. For example, in **Cleveland, OH,** a scholarship program enables 1,700 low-income students to attend 49 private and religious schools. The state pays up to $2,250 toward tuition for each student. In **Milwaukee, WI,** the program is open only to low-income students and allows parents to send their children to private or public non-religious schools, using a $4,400 stipend that equals the state's per-pupil funding allocation.

Public-Private Partnerships

These partnerships are collaboratives made up of organizations that work together to expand involvement in education at the national, state, and local levels. **New American Schools (NAS)** is one such partnership, created in 1991. It includes educators, parents, and community and business leaders who are working to improve achievement for all students. NAS funds seven design teams that are developing break-the-mold schools that will be used as models for other schools.

The **National Alliance of Business (NAB)** participates in a number of partnerships, both on its own and as a member of the Business Coalition for Education Reform. For example, NAB works to involve business leaders in school improvement initiatives by organizing school-to-work, skills training, and career counseling programs around the country.

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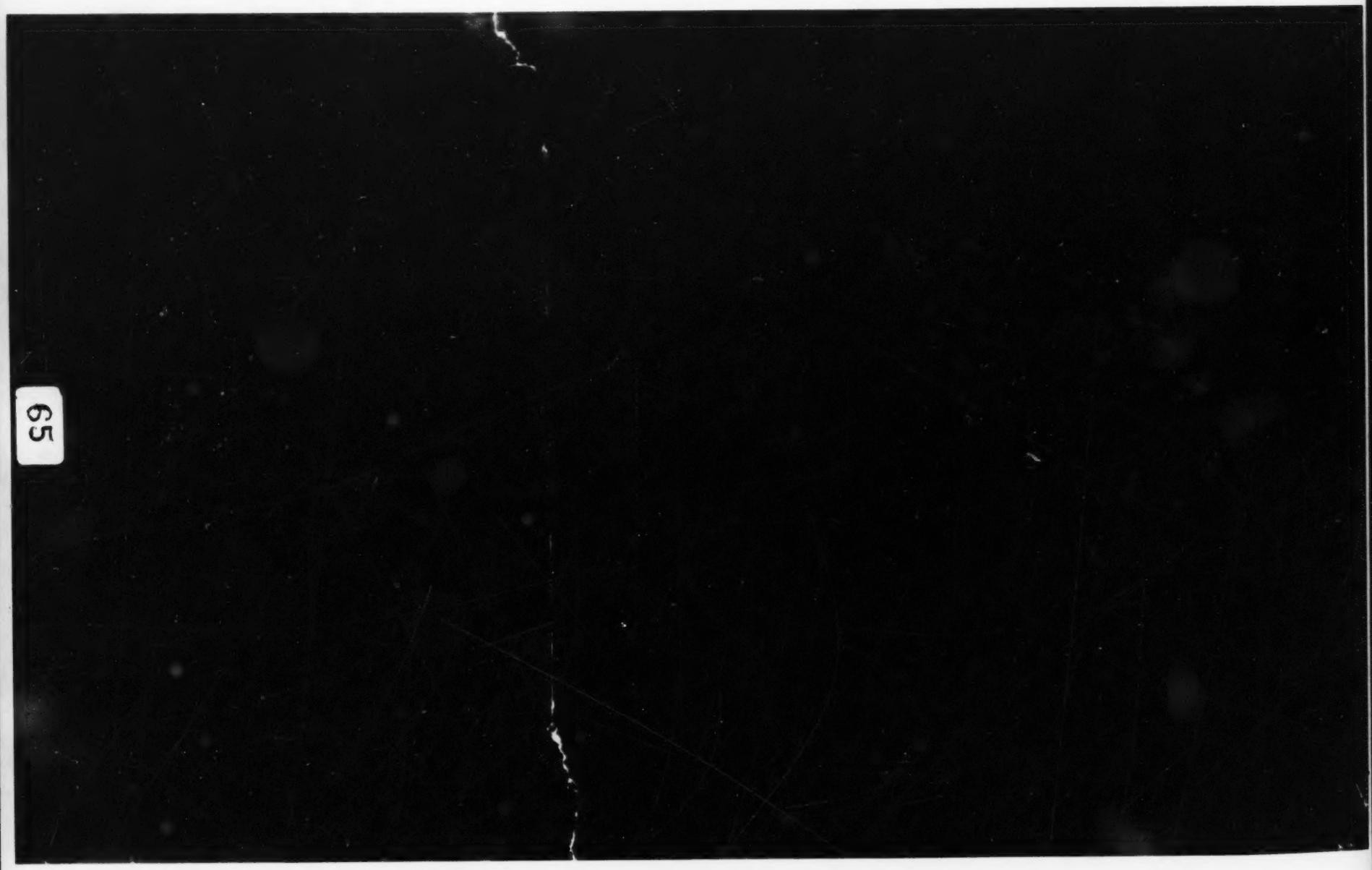

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